

OLAF and Viet Nam strengthen cooperation against customs fraud

The European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) and the Ministry of Finance of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam have signed today an agreement that will facilitate their cooperation in the fight against fraud in the area of customs. Viet Nam is the EU's second most important trading partner in the ASEAN region.

OLAF and Viet Nam Customs are already working together to tackle customs fraud by exchanging information as well as in the framework of joint customs operations, for example against illicit pesticides. In fact, the Free Trade Agreement that the EU and Viet Nam signed in 2019 contains a protocol dedicated to mutual assistance in the area of customs. The new administrative cooperation arrangement signed today will help implement the protocol and set the basis to facilitate everyday operational activities.

Ville Itälä, Director-General of OLAF, said: *"I very much welcome today's agreement that strengthens OLAF's international network. I would like to thank Viet Nam Customs for the constructive and friendly negotiations, as well as for our good cooperation on the ground so far. Viet Nam is an important trade partner for the EU, with a boosting economy and key geographical location. Together we can react promptly against smugglers, counterfeiters, or other suspicions of customs fraud. Today's signatures will help us do just that".*

Nguyen Van Can, Director-General of the General Department of Viet Nam Customs, said: *"I emphasise the importance of sharing information and cooperation between the two sides to prevent smuggling, trade fraud, origin fraud for boosting trade and investment between Viet Nam and the EU. I would like to thank OLAF for the readiness and arrangement for this signing; with this we will have further successful cooperation activities".*

Under the arrangement, it will be easier for OLAF and Viet Nam Customs to exchange information in connection with the fight against illicit trade in tobacco products, counterfeit goods, origin fraud, customs valuation fraud, illicit transshipment of waste and endangered species. The arrangement also covers assistance and cooperation activities as well as training. To facilitate the implementation of the arrangement, contact points are designated on each side.

OLAF mission, mandate and competences:

OLAF's mission is to detect, investigate and stop fraud with EU funds.

OLAF fulfils its mission by:

- carrying out independent investigations into fraud and corruption involving EU funds, so as to ensure that all EU taxpayers' money reaches projects that can create jobs and growth in Europe;
- contributing to strengthening citizens' trust in the EU Institutions by investigating serious misconduct by EU staff and members of the EU Institutions;
- developing a sound EU anti-fraud policy.

In its independent investigative function, OLAF can investigate matters relating to fraud, corruption and other offences affecting the EU financial interests concerning:

- all EU expenditure: the main spending categories are Structural Funds, agricultural policy and rural development funds, direct expenditure and external aid;
- some areas of EU revenue, mainly customs duties;
- suspicions of serious misconduct by EU staff and members of the EU institutions.

Once OLAF has completed its investigation, it is for the competent EU and national authorities to examine and decide on the follow-up of OLAF's recommendations. All persons concerned are presumed to be innocent until proven guilty in a competent national or EU court of law.

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